



Scottish Interfaith Week 2017

‘Creativity and the Arts’

Religion has been an inspiration for the expression of beauty, witnessed in creative activities such as architecture, art, music and dance. This year gives an opportunity to celebrate the diverse expressions of this creative activity in different religions and cultures. Creativity and the arts in the context of faith and belief could be seen as:

- a means of putting deeply held beliefs, wisdom, ideas, visions, values and stories from different faiths into creative form
- a way of exploring the deeper meaning of life and our relationship to the sacred, enriching our spiritual or faith journeys
- a way of expressing human emotion, connecting with the divine and sharing this experience with others
- an expression of the beauty to be found in nature, human experience, the divine attributes or the philosophy of life that the art symbolises
- a way of uplifting the human spirit and assisting in the improvement of health, wellbeing and community relations

You may wish to explore some of these aspects in dialogue with others.

Creativity and the Arts in the World Faiths

All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom. It is no mere chance that our older universities developed from clerical schools. Both churches and universities — insofar as they live up to their true function — serve the ennoblement of the individual. They seek to fulfill this great task by spreading moral and cultural understanding, renouncing the use of brute force.

Albert Einstein, "Moral Decay" (1937); later published in Out of My Later Years (1950)

All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising, for the edification of mankind, pinned down by the conditions of its existence to the earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality.

Joseph Conrad, Henry James — An Appreciation (1905).

Baha'i Faith

Art is regarded as worship.

'The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the temple'.

Abdu'l-Baha



Examples of Baha'i Art

Architecture: Houses of Worship

Literature: Holy Scriptures and other religious literature by different authors including poetry

Gardens: Baha'i gardens in Haifa and Akko

Buddhism

Engaging in artistic activity allows beauty to come into your life

Often when a person feels this sense of awe, amazement or love of what is, they need to do something with the energy that is created. That could lead to drawing, poetry, or constructing something. Art for me is not about the best or the greatest artist, it's about acknowledging our life force (in Buddhism this is sometimes called our Buddha nature). To hide it, or suppress it, leads us into depression, anger and frustration. If we open up to that part of ourselves, it allows expression, courage, and beauty. What would you do to allow beauty into your life?

Amaranatho, a Buddhist monk



Example of Buddhist Art

Buddhism in general:

Architecture of Buddhist temples, stupas, monasteries

Statues and paintings of the Buddha

Chanting of mantras in meditation or worship

Zen Buddhism:

Zen gardens, pagodas, poetry (Haiku), art

Tibetan Buddhism:

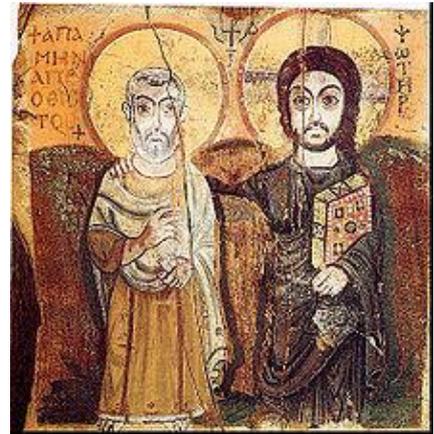
Wall Paintings or 'thangkas' illustrate stories from the life of the Buddha, bodhisattvas and other heavenly beings; Sand mandalas illustrate the fragile nature of beauty and impermanence; Singing bowls and tingsha (small cymbals) used in prayer and meditation; Prayer flags and prayer wheels containing the scriptures.

Christianity

On meeting a former artist in heaven,

‘When you painted on earth, it was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the earthly landscape...that enabled others to see the glimpses too... light itself was your first love: you loved paint as a means of telling about light’.

C.S.Lewis, The Great Divorce (a novel)



Examples of Christian Art

Paintings: Religious paintings, frescoes and stained glass windows depict religious figures, stories from the Bible and Christian beliefs and concepts such as forgiveness and salvation; Icons – religious works of art, most commonly paintings, found particularly in the Orthodox and Eastern Christian traditions; Illustrated manuscripts, for example the Book of Kells, depicting Celtic knot work and religious figures from the Bible

Music: Religious music such as the singing of hymns and sacred songs

Poetry: Poetry, for example poetic texts from the Bible, poetic prayers, sermons; Poetry in the Celtic Christian tradition such as John Philip Newell

Movies: Religious films about stories from the Bible or the Christian tradition

Architecture: Church buildings

Statues: of Jesus, Mary, Saints and angels

Crosses: for example stone high crosses from the ancient Celtic Christian traditions or crucifixes in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Hinduism

Indian art is essentially religious.

The conscious aim of Indian art is the intimation of Divinity. But the Infinite and Unconditioned cannot be expressed in finite terms; and art, unable to portray Divinity unconditioned, and unwilling to be limited by the limitation of humanity, is in India dedicated to the representation of gods, who to finite man represent comprehensible aspects of an infinite whole.

Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy



Examples of Hindu Art

Architecture: Hindu Mandir

Statues of Deities

There are 64 traditional arts in Hinduism, including:

Music: Singing, dancing, instrumental music

Drama and poetry

Painting and rangoli (patterns made on the floor)

Making flower garlands

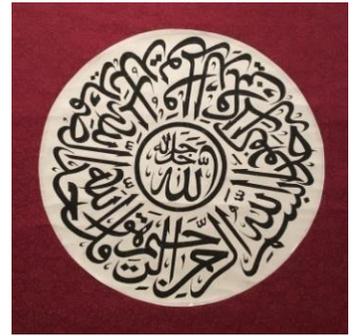
Clothing and jewellery

Islam

Art and beauty are created by God

Allah is beautiful and loves beauty

Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), The Hadith



The Qur'an is considered to be a beautiful poetic style of Arabic and verses are recited by speech or in song as worship to God

Arabic calligraphy puts verses of the Qur'an into visual form, for example on buildings, coins, tiles and wall hangings

The term 'Islamic Art' can be used to describe artistic works of the Muslim world and includes decorated metalwork, ceramics, glass vessels, miniature paintings, carpets and textiles

Islamic Art is known for its geometric patterns which illustrate the divine beauty and the perfection of God. This can also be seen in the architecture and design on the walls of mosques

Illustrated manuscripts (miniature)

Prayer mats of all sizes and patterns

The Sufi tradition

Poetry is important in the Sufi tradition, for example the works of Rumi and Hafiz

Dancing or 'whirling' practiced by the Sufi Dervishes, a meditation practice performed in worship in the Sufi tradition.

Judaism

Art is eternal

This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being.

Martin Buber, I and Thou



Examples of Jewish Art

Poetry, e.g. poetic texts from the Hebrew Scriptures such as the Book of Psalms and Song of Songs; Jewish literature in different languages and cultural contexts, for example Austria/Germany around 1900, the USA from middle of the 20th century, Yiddish literature and theatre and Hebrew literature

Music - Sacred music and Klezmer (singing and dancing); in the Hebrew Scriptures, dance is referred to as an important religious activity and as an expression of joy and worship to God. It is often evidenced in Jewish weddings today.

Art of writing the Torah by hand

Architecture: Synagogue

Movies: Jewish/Yiddish films

Sikhism

God is in everything

Why do you go to the forest in search of the divine? God lives in all and abides with you too. As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror, so the divine dwells inside everything; seek therefore in your own heart. *Guru Tegh Bahadur (the 9th of the 10 Sikh Gurus)*



Examples of Sikh Art

Architecture: Gurdwara buildings, for example the Golden Temple in Amritsar

Paintings of the scriptures and the life of the Gurus

Sikh *hymns or 'kirtan'* from the scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, often accompanied by musical instruments such as the tabla (drum) and harmonium

Dancing: The Sikh scriptures refers to dancing as an act of worship to God: 'Your humble servant dances and sings Your Glorious Praises'